



Department
for Work &
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Rt. Hon Frank Field MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Select
Committee
House of Commons
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19 October 2018

Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter dated 1 October, in which you have asked for clarification on several issues relating to Monday's announcement on Universal Support. I will answer them as numbered in your letter.

1. Might you please confirm the budget for Universal Support for 2019/20?

There is an overall budget for Universal Support, set at £200m in the Universal Credit Business case. The amount we have agreed with Citizen's Advice reflects the service they can deliver for us at an affordable amount within the overall budget available.

2. Is this additional funding or does it come from the existing budget for Universal Support?

This funding comes from prioritising the existing budget for Universal Support.

3. Might you please confirm whether these restrictions will remain in place from April 2019 when the new delivery contract with Citizen's Advice begins?

4. Does the Department have any plans to fund this longer-term support with adjusting to Universal Credit as part of its contract with Citizen's Advice?

The grant agreement covers the period October 2018 to the end of March 2020. We are working with Citizens Advice to develop a service that will ensure that everyone gets the help they need to make and manage their Universal Credit claim; offering them the practical support they need to get their first payment on time and be ready to manage it when it arrives. We will continue to iterate that service and concentrate our resources and efforts on what works for the most vulnerable.

5. Does the Department have any plans to allow Citizen's Advice to deliver debt advice to Universal Credit claimants as part of the new contract?

The agreement we have signed with Citizens Advice for October 2018 – March 2020 does not include Debt Advice. Debt advice is already provided by The Money Advice Service and we signpost claimants who need this support to them.

For January 2019, the Single Financial Guidance Body will become operational, combining the services currently delivered by the Money Advice Service, the Pensions Advisory Service and Pension Wise, including the provision of debt advice.

6. Might you please provide an update on the Department's data and evidence collection on claimant's support needs?

The Universal Credit build already enables staff to record relevant details about an individual's needs. As the Committee is aware, we recently trialled Pinned Notes to ensure key profile notes are instantly visible to all staff helping a claimant. This trial was positive, and on 20 September 2018 the Pinned Notes feature was rolled out nationally.

We are also continuing work to explore ways in which we collect and use information recorded by our staff by using data mining techniques in order to help us monitor support for people with complex needs.

6(a). Might you please also outline how the department plans to use evaluation and analysis of claimant support needs to inform the delivery of Universal Support after 2019/20?

Our intention is that we develop the service as we learn, drawing on what we see working best for our claimant groups. We have planned a review of the service towards the end of March 2020 when the grant period ends, to evaluate provision and to determine whether other changes need to be made. We will make a full and thorough assessment of the delivery of Universal Support which will include quantitative and qualitative data, including from claimants and other delivery partners in this field.

We are working closely with Citizens Advice to ensure we have the right mechanisms in place to undertake this work from April 2019, including developing claimant survey capture and reporting. Findings will be used to inform next steps, including whether we continue the service with Citizens Advice beyond March 2020, or whether we would chose to tender this provision inviting alternative providers to bid to deliver this service.

Kind regards,


Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State for Employment